SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION
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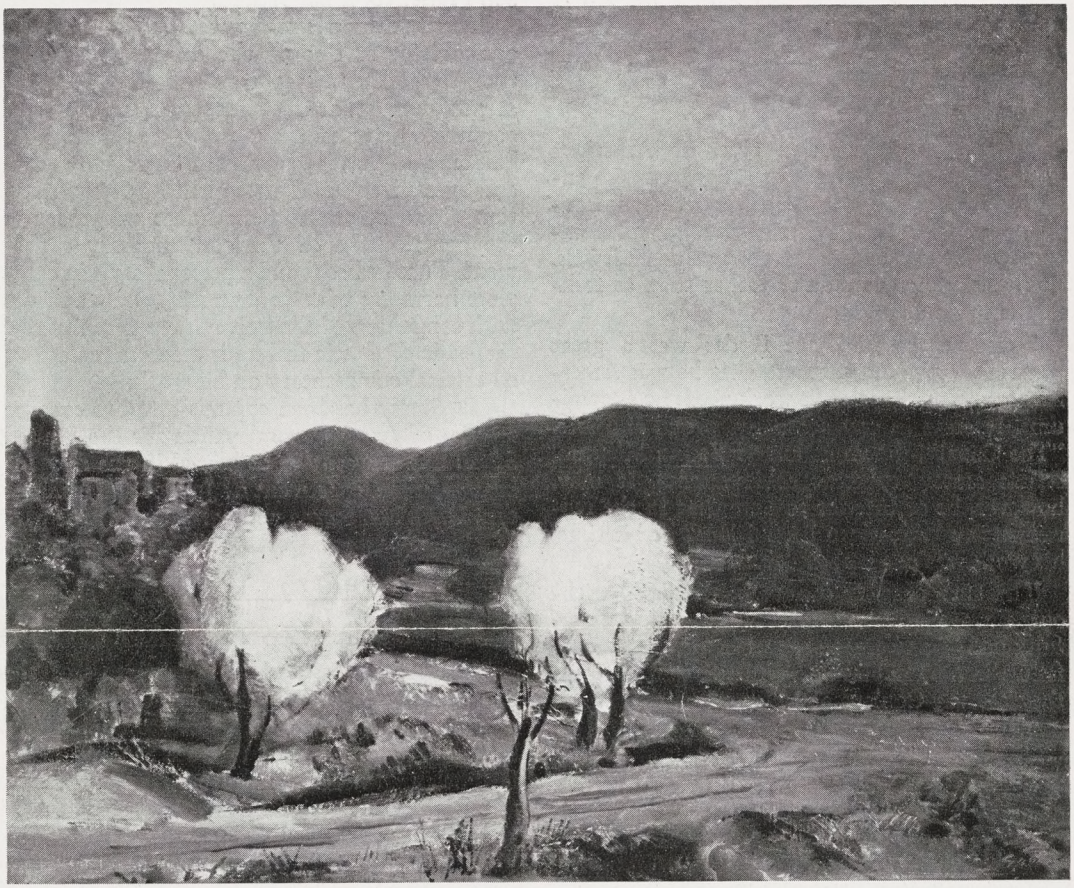

CALIFORNIA EVENING *(Exhibition American Painting, Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco), by William A. Gaw.*

Painting, American and Otherwise

By WILLIAM B. HESTHAL

The exhibition of American painting just concluded at our municipal museums was my first opportunity to get a comprehensive view of our plastic background. Disappointed, I am now writing this (without the pretention of arriving at fixed conclusions) to settle and organize my diverse impressions. I ask forbearance.

To begin, I feel the continually proclaimed link between a nationalism and painting to be insidious; insidious in that no nation, however richly endowed, has had the happy accident of so lavishly engendering its expression that by itself it can proclaim, "Behold,—this is the beginning and the end,—and Art". There are shows upon shows of painting, shows with the superfluous labels of English—French—African—American, etc., attached to them. Why? Does a national soil contain a magic that can sprout potatoes and art with like fecundity? I challenge the contention, feeling sure that if there is, that happy land is not America.

Three centuries of American painting support my thesis, three centuries that produce one Ryder, one artist that transcends his time and country, and whose achievements take their rightful place with man's rich spiritual heritage.

It is comparatively easy to speak of pictures' plastic values, to conjure forth an abacadabra of empty shop talk that sounds like much but tells one nothing. Form, color, line, design, etc., etc. (We know the clap-trap.) One can spout infinitely of the subject. But to what end? The

painting must speak, speak for itself within its frame.

With all the foregoing in mind I cannot justify 18th century American painting as such, or tell you that it was anything more than solid journeyman painting worked in an English tradition of portraiture. Good, yes, and often successful, but as I see it not enough. Painting is not a matter of success and failure. To fail in the realization of a vision worth the struggle is often far more noble than an essay certain from the start. The great artist's dreams usually judge him a failure.

The recent approbation given to American primitives seems out of all proportion. I cannot find much more in them than what is honest and naïve. True, that is much, and compared to Stuart or Copley they shine as jewels. But then, what wouldn't? Other than as folklore they do not wear.

That Albert Pinkham Ryder was a great painter is beyond refute and that he was American, only incidental. His work needs no encomiums. It stays in any company, proud and free. "The Canal", shown at the de Young Museum, stands among supreme achievements. It may, however, be of interest to note that in the representative "American Exhibitions" of his time, his work was not included.

The 19th century cannot be dismissed without a word concerning Thomas Eakins. Painfully honest and sincere, I feel in him our "noble failure". As for Homer, Whistler and Sargent, they are the Copleys and Stuarts of their time.

Twentieth century American painting brings with it the awakening of nationalism in art. The era of "labeled" exhibitions begins. Further, painting becomes a matter of not seeing forests for the trees. Highly publicised, artists rest on paper reputations. As with the stock market, reputations boom and crash. The public is confused and painting as a business (God help us) fails amid much wailing. But I doubt that all this really matters. Three paintings—John Kane's "Return from the Fields", Mathew Barnes' "Night Scene" and Henry Matson's "Marine" are the basis for my doubt. Hokuspokus, form, design, etc., etc., these paintings have these qualities, but also something that transcends them, a living intangible something. The artists, as it were, have shut their eyes and listened to an inner voice, have taken their noses out of paint pots, and have felt their living heart beats. Time, of course, will be the judge but I suspect their work will live.

In closing I would like to mention the unhealthy inferiority American painters have developed in their regard of 19th and 20th century French art. Suffering from this evil, current painters go to fruitless lengths in being "plain American". Perhaps in their success they have failed,—failed their art!

Maurice Sterne to Teach at Art School

The engagement of Mr. Maurice Sterne as visiting instructor in Painting and Drawing for the Regular Session of 1935-36, from August 19th to May 15th, and for the 1936 Summer Session of the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, is announced.

Maurice Sterne is recognized by fellow artists and critics as one of the most sincere and thoughtful of contemporary American painters. A profound student of art of all periods and countries, he remains a thorough modern in the best sense,—that is to say by intimate conviction and by realization of those qualities of organization, form, color and design that we accept as the contribution of the contemporary movement. That he has found a personal style in complete harmony with contemporary art, and yet with something of the universality, serenity and certitude of classic feeling is a commonplace of all critical commentary on his work.

Mr. Sterne has been commissioned to execute a series of twenty mural panels for the United States Government to be placed in the new Library of the Department of Justice at Washington, D. C. Mr. Sterne will carry out a large part of this important work while in residence in California.

New Scholarships for Art School

The president and board of directors of the San Francisco Art Association announce the inauguration this year of scholarships made possible through bequests of the late Senator James D. Phelan and of the late Abraham Rosenberg, as follows:

JAMES D. PHELAN FOREIGN TRAVELING SCHOLARSHIP: $2,000 to be awarded annually to a student under thirty years of age who has completed at least two consecutive years of study in the day or night courses of the California School of Fine Arts.

JAMES D. PHELAN TUITION SCHOLARSHIPS: Six scholarships entitling the recipients to a year's tuition in the school will be awarded annually to students who have completed at least one year of study in the day or night courses of this school.

THE ABRAHAM ROSENBERG SCHOLARSHIP FUND: A fund of $50,000.00, the income from which is "to be used and applied in the discretion" of the Association's Board of Directors "for a scholarship or scholarships to be awarded and paid in their discretion to worthy students of the Association." The income available from this fund will be used by the Board of Directors to provide scholarships from time to time, in such amounts as it deems proper in each instance, to enable or assist students who have shown marked talent to pursue such studies as will serve to develop that talent.

FRAGMENT OF FRESCO *(Presidio Chapel, San Francisco), by Victor Arnautoff.*

The above fragment gives but a small impression of the fresco recently completed in the Court of the Chapel in San Francisco's Military Reservation. The design, which uses the figure of St. Francis as its central motif, depicts religion, the history of racial and national changes in California and the activity of the United States Army in fields other than warfare. It embraces the R. O. T. C., C. C. C., Aviation, Radio and Engineering on the right of the central figure of St. Francis, while to the left of the figure is depicted the early settlers of California. The easy flowing lines of the composition and the respect Arnautoff has shown for the wall surface places this mural as one of the most successful of recent achievements in fresco.

He Who Has Ideas

By RAY BOYNTON

I believe that it cannot be seriously contradicted that we have moved continually away from unity in the arts—for the last century and more, by degrees, for the last fifty years, steadily and with accelerated speed. What we have called schools turn out to be groups of two or three or merely isolated individuals with a minor league following, held together by a mad devotion to an esthetic principle.

One could produce a sound historical argument that this has been going on steadily since the Reformation (the Renaissance). One cause worth commenting on I think is the fact that all art schools from the time art schools were founded have set up for students to study only one phase of the antique, the classic—that is to say, the Roman and Renaissance and their classic Greek prototype; never the archaic forms nor the Assyrian nor the Egyptian nor any that are interesting primarily for their energy and expressiveness. From the time of the Renaissance we have been encouraged to imitate one phase of realism as an esthetic ideal. We have gradually lost the spontaneous connection between idea and creation—between idea and decorative purpose. The pictorial has displaced decorative understanding and the easel picture is almost the sole output of such training.

With one kind of form held up as an imitative ideal one might expect a kind of unity to appear, and it did. A catholicity of spurious classic was veneered over everybody so that a Dutchman and a Latin and a Russian spoke the same language after a fashion. But classic is the last phase before disintegration in any culture and a spurious classic is already disintegration. In any case such a leveling would only tend at best to elevate individuals who were more apt and to stimulate individuality as a means of self-assertion. The individual becomes the unique product of such a development.

What I have been trying to say is that when a single ideal of form as method is the whole basis of training and effort uniqueness only appears in the individual if at all. When method and esthetics are subordinated to the absorption and expression of ideas something happens that may suppress the individual but elevate to uniqueness the group which shares the same ideas. We

(Continued on page 5)

San Francisco Art Association Bulletin

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Send material for Bulletin to San Francisco Art Association, Chestnut and Jones, by 20th of each month.

The San Francisco Art Association ushers in this autumn season under most happy circumstances.

The San Francisco Museum of Art, upon which the Art Association focused so many years of its consideration and energy, has taken its place as one of San Francisco's treasure spots. More and more are the galleries becoming a gathering place where an evening spent in its tranquil atmosphere serves as a pleasant means of diversion as well as a mental and spiritual stimulus.

San Franciscans have responded wholeheartedly to this fine new addition to our Civic Center and the habit of "dropping in to the Museum" is becoming a fixed part of our communal life.

The first group show of local painters (held in July) gathered together by the Artists' Council of the Art Association, inaugurated an excellent policy and it has been determined to hold group shows of like character thrice yearly.

Two new ventures will be introduced this fall. The first Sculpture Show featuring the work of western sculptors will open August 16th. It will embrace 30 years of sculpture in the West.

The First Annual Exhibition of Graphic Arts and Water-Colors, sponsored by the San Francisco Art Association will open September 13th, to hang for one month. In separating the Graphic Arts and Water-Colors into a distinct fall annual the Art Association is reponding to a need long feld by artists working in these media.

The California School of Fine Arts, maintained by the Art Association, will enter a most distinguished year. The addition to the faculty of Mr. Maurice Sterne, as visiting instructor, will create fresh enthusiasm among the local artists and students and places the Art School in a most enviable light. The far-reaching influences of the Phelan and Rosenberg Scholarships cannot be overestimated.

In maintaining the Art School, in helping to develop its artist members and in creating a bond between the artist and lay public through the means of the museum, the Art Association is fulfilling its self-imposed obligations. Let all local artists pledge to it their loyalty and support!

Dr. Morley Reports on Conference

By DR. GRACE MCCANN MORLEY

The museum field, like any other highly specialized profession, has its interests and problems. Once a year, therefore, professional museum workers from all parts of the continent gather to discuss questions of vital concern. In May of this year the American Association of Museums held its annual meeting in Washington, D. C. For the greater convenience of that part of the group especially interested in art, the College Art Association and the American Federation of Arts convened there the same week.

Some nine hundred museum executives, museum workers in various departments, art writers, dealers, professors, critics, collectors, etc., attended the sessions of which a number of sections, each devoted to a special problem, were held simultaneously every morning, afternoon and evening throughout the week. Because of the particular type of our museum, as well as my own long-standing interests, I concentrated on those sections devoted to the museum as a center of art education for the public, ways in which it can serve the artist, installation, contemporary art, and probable future role of museums in this country—occasionally dipping into certain aspects of art criticism, museum finance, or publicity that seemed to promise fruitful material.

Discussion and comparison of what various museums have done and are doing to promote the understanding of art among laymen, to increase the interested and art-instructed public and to encourage active appreciation of art by a group intent on acquiring art work, were subjects that held special appeal for me. The reports confirmed my own conviction that the best way of achieving these ends is to hold carefully selected and varied exhibitions, install them as attractively as experience and trained taste will permit and then make sure that a constructive and instructive opportunity for learning what it is all about is provided for visitors who care to profit. That has been our aim in the museum here.

Both in Washington and in the other cities I visited I spent much time in museums, revisiting the collections, and studying installation. In New York, I frequented the galleries, familiarized myself with the recent work of artists whose painting I knew, and finding new names that have come into notice since my last trip there, two years ago. From every point of view, my trip east was a most fruitful and stimulating one and will serve me well in gathering material for interesting exhibitions for the coming year. I feel, too, that new ideas on art education, installation, publicity and the hundred other aspects of museum administration gleaned from my talks with others or developed as a result of these talks will aid in making my work for the museum more effective.

He Who Has Ideas

(Continued from page 3)

touch the skirt of that unity in the work of children. All children compose from ideas and from their environment as naturally as they talk when our methods of "training" them have not crippled them; and all children of any similar environment have a common fund of ideas. Any child who draws spontaneously will relate the events of a day's outing in one picture without being troubled with the matter of time and sequence. "We traveled in an automobile—the road went over hills—we crossed a bridge—we picked flowers, etc.", and it is quite as likely as not to be all in one picture if the paper holds out as long as his ideas do. Vividness of imagination and vigor of expression count rather than method or knowledge as the principal ingredient.

We do not need to try to draw like children, that is, to imitate the immature qualities of their drawing. That is done often enough and it always looks foolish. But we can learn something from their manner of composing. We have grown so accustomed to concentrating all of our attention on the mechanics of method that we have almost forgotten that ideas might play any part in composing. But they do and they always did in any period that produced great composing.

He who has ideas paints them and he who has not elaborates esthetic argument on canvas and paints still-life seriously. This brings to mind Thomas Benton. Now Thomas Benton is a name that already arouses vigorous reaction and controversy because he stands for something positive. Whether we like his work or not (God knows we can dislike it heartily enough)—it is violent and gaudy, even bawdy, and crude and everything else you say it is—but it is the reflection of an energetic figure with a positive idea and a keen intelligence combined with tenacity of purpose; withal it is genuine and large enough to embrace the whole of American effort. He is articulate, too, even vociferous, and Thomas Craven has been his mouthpiece for some years. He is already becoming the symbol of American art of the contemporary scene and I for one rejoice at the spectacle. Like him or not, such a figure has been needed these many years to shake us into consciousness and to cuff a lot of nonsense out of our ways. We have cherished a pernicious adolescent habit of going French and then Mexican and then Picasso that we should begin to outgrow. We might look around and size each other up with profit and begin to think in ideas instead of mannerisms. We already have Grant Wood and a few others to contemplate as something of our own time and kind. We have a generation growing up who are going to be more conscious of the Bentons and the Woods than we are. That is where American art is going to begin.

Negro Sculpture at Museum Superb Collection

By Alfred Frankenstein

(Excerpts from S. F. Chronicle)

Monuments of ancient culture and ancient savagery, none the less monumental for their small size, comprise the magnificent exhibition of African negro sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Art. The number of objects is bewildering and the number of cultures, religions and traditions represented is beyond citation within the space available.

. . . . .

The sculpture is old, old in spirit from the repetition of patterns across the centuries, regardless of the age of the individual figure. It is anonymous and communal, the product of the folk and the race rather than the work of the individual artist. And it is above everything tragic, as if distilled from and disciplined by ancient folk fears.

. . . . .

The ethnographic side of the exhibition is endlessly fascinating. The oldest works are the bronzes in high relief, rescued from the sixteenth century metropolis, now destroyed, of Benin. These flat-nosed, broad-cheeked, clothed figures with their stiffly yoked necks seem to lie close to the artistic traditions we know and practice. Whether Benin carried on from ancient Egypt or took over from Renaissance Europe is a matter for debate among the experts. At any rate the reliefs have the serene dignity of archaic art as we know it. The small portrait heads from British Nigeria have much in common with our own classic tradition in sculpture, also.

. . . . .

When one proceeds to examine the pieces from the Sudan, Cameroon, Dahomey, the Ivory Coast, and other sections, one seems at first to be entering a howling jungle of madly contorted forms, many of them close to caricature. But the moment one becomes adjusted to the language of the sculpture, distorting and caricature disappear, and one senses, without quite understanding, the darkness and heroism expressed round about.

Group Show at Museum

The first group show of local artists, under the auspices of the Artists' Council of the Art Association was held at the San Francisco Museum of Art during July. The exhibition, which reflected most careful selection, was beautifully hung.

The following artists participated: Gertrude Albright, Mathew Barnes, Jane Berlandina, Ray Boynton, Margaret Bruton, Rinaldo Cuneo, Ben Cunningham, Maynard Dixon, Stafford Duncan, Nils Gren, John Howard, Eugene Ivanoff, Lucien Labaudt, Frances Lieberman, Y. Okamoto, Otis Oldfield, David Park, Gottardo Piazzoni, Nelson Poole, Frede Vidar.

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August Exhibitions in Local Galleries

Amberg-Hirth, 165 Post Street: Hand-woven Fabrics by Harry Green; Wood-carving for Domestic Use by Franzi Baxter; New Pottery and Hand-made Glass by Glen Lukens; Regular Exhibitions Arts and Crafts.

Art Center, 730 Montgomery Street: Gallery opens August 26—Group Show of Oils.

California Palace of the Legion of Honor, Lincoln Park: Exhibition of Soviet Art, through August 21; Exhibition of Porcelains, opens August 5; Old Masters, opens August 5; Monthly Exhibition of California Painters, changes August 21.

Courvoisier Galleries, 480 Post Street: August 5 to 20, Old Masters (Oils).

De Young Museum, Golden Gate Park: Illustrative Photography, through August 11; Textile Art Through the Ages, August 15 to September—Guatemalan Textiles and Peasant Costumes collected by Ruth Reeves, opens August 15.

Paul Elder, 239 Post Street: Facsimilies of Modern Paintings, July 29 to August 24.

Gump Galleries, 246 Post Street: Prints by the Association of American Artists, and etchings by California artists, first three weeks of August.

San Francisco Museum of Art, Civic Center: African Negro Art, through August to September 8. Sculpture by Beniamino Bufano; Gouaches by Jean Lurcat; Drawings by Diego Rivera, through August 11; Paintings by French Impressionists, through August; American Print Makers, July 26 to August 25; Thirty Years of Sculpture in San Francisco, August 16 to September 28; Paintings and Drawings by Maurice Sterne, visiting professor, California School of Fine Arts, 1935-1936, August 23 to September 29.

Roy Vernon Sowers, 451 Post Street: English Society of Graver-Printers in Color, through August; Fine Printing by San Francisco Firms, Taylor & Taylor, Windsor Press, Johnck & Seeger, John Henry Nash, Grabhorn Press, through August.

Oakland Art Gallery, Twelfth and Fallon Streets: Permanent Collection.

SCHEDULE OF FREE GALLERY LECTURES
AUGUST, 1935

San Francisco Museum of Art

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7, 8:30 P. M.
African Woodcarvers . . . . . Mrs. George Dane
FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 3:30 P. M.
African Negro Art . . . . . Mrs. George Dane
TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 3:30 P. M.
African Negro Goldwork . . . . . Mrs. George Dane
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21, 3:30 P. M.
Oceanic Carving . . . . . Dr. G. L. Morley
FRIDAY, AUGUST 23, 8:30 P. M.
African Negro Goldwork . . . . . Mrs. George Dane
THURSDAY, AUGUST 29, 3:30 P. M.
African Sculpture . . . . . Mrs. George Dane
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 8:30 P. M.
Bronzes of Benin . . . . . Mrs. George Dane

SPECIAL FREE LECTURES

WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 8:30 P. M.
African Negro Sculpture and Modern Art Dr. G. L. Morley
THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 8:30 P. M.
Regional Styles and Special Techniques in African Art . . . . . Dr. G. L. Morley
TUESDAY, AUGUST 27, 8:30 P. M.
African Negro and Oceanic Art Compared . . . . . Miss Claudia Davis